Organic Farming in National Socialist Germany: The Politics of Biodynamic Agriculture, 1933-1945

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Abstract: The controversy over the nature and extent of official support for organic agriculture in NS Germany has generally focused on the minister of agriculture, R.W. Darré, and his putative endorsement of biodynamic farming. By shifting focus from the figure of Darré to other sectors of the Nazi hierarchy, this article re-examines a contested chapter in the environmental history of the Third Reich. Using previously neglected sources, I trace several important bases of institutional support for biodynamic agriculture spanning much of the Nazi period. Both the biodynamic movement and the Nazi party were internally heterogeneous, with different factions pursuing different goals. While some Nazi agencies backed biodynamic methods, others attacked such methods for ideological as well as practical reasons, particularly objecting to their occult origins. The article centers on the political dimension of these disputes, highlighting the relative success of the biodynamic movement in fostering ongoing cooperation with various Nazi organizations. I argue that the entwinement of biodynamic advocates and Nazi institutions was more extensive than scholars have heretofore acknowledged.

Introduction

Debates over the purportedly green or environmentalist aspects of National Socialism have divided historians for decades. The vexed relationship between NS blood and soil ideals and the concrete realities of ecologically oriented practices has generated sharply divergent analyses. While some accounts attribute a proto-environmentalist tendency to specific strands within the Nazi apparatus, others dispute the very notion of significant National Socialist support for conservation measures, nature protection, organic farming, and similar endeavors.[1] Earlier

[1] For a variety of perspectives compare Gert Gröning and Joachim Wolschke, "Naturschutz und Ökologie im Nationalsozialismus," *Die alte Stadt* 10 (1983): 1-17; Raymond Dominick, *The Environmental Movement in Germany* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 81-115; Burkhardt Riechers, "Nature Protection during National Socialism," *Historical Social Research* 21 (1996): 34-56; Joachim Radkau and Frank Uekötter, eds., *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2003); Franz-Josef Brüggemeier, Mark Cioc, and Thomas Zeller, eds., *How Green were the Nazis? Nature, Environment, and Nation in the Third Reich* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005); Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, "Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus - Darstellungen im Spannungsfeld von Verdrängung, Verharmlosung und Interpretation," in *Naturschutz und Demokratie!?* ed. Gert Gröning and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn (Munich: Meidenbauer, 2006), 91-114; Frank Uekötter, "Green Nazis? Reassessing the Environmental History of Nazi Germany," *German Studies Review* 30 (2007): 267-87.

studies posited a green faction around Nazi agriculture minister Richard Walther Darré, emphasizing in particular his ostensible support for biodynamic farming, a prominent form of organic agriculture.[2] Subsequent critiques have fundamentally challenged such claims, leading some historians to deny that Darré supported organic farming at all.[3] Archival evidence reveals a more complex history, centered not on the figure of Darré but on various blocs within his staff as well as in other sectors of the Nazi hierarchy. Rather than a straightforward narrative of either support for or opposition to organic agriculture, documents from German archives and little-known contemporary publications indicate ambiguous interactions between biodynamic proponents and competing groups of Nazi officials. An especially obscure strand in these interactions involves the notably close cooperation between the biodynamic movement and several distinct Nazi factions.

Untangling this intricate history provides an illuminating case study in the vagaries of early organic politics within the conflicted context of a notoriously authoritarian regime. Marginal as organic agriculture was in the Nazi era, the research sheds new light not only on the green sides of Nazism but on the motivations and expectations of environmentally inclined farmers and proponents of sustainability. Re-orienting common assumptions about the political resonance of proto-environmental practices, this complicated chapter in the history of alternative agriculture raises challenging questions about the extent to which ecologically oriented

[2] Anna Bramwell, *Blood and Soil: Richard Walther Darré and Hitler's 'Green Party'* (Bourne End: Kensal Press, 1985); Anna Bramwell, "The Steiner Connection," in Bramwell, *Ecology in the 20th Century: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 195-208. Critical appraisals include Piers Stephens, "Blood, Not Soil: Anna Bramwell and the Myth of 'Hitler's Green Party'," *Organization & Environment* 14 (2001): 173-87; Gesine Gerhard, "Richard Walther Darré – Naturschützer oder 'Rassenzüchter'?" in *Naturschutz und Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Radkau and Uekötter 257-71; Gesine Gerhard, "Breeding Pigs and People for the Third Reich: Richard Walther Darré's Agrarian Ideology," in *How Green were the Nazis*, ed. Brüggemeier, Cioc, and Zeller 129-46.

[3] See e.g. Frank Uekoetter, *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 203. More detailed and nuanced assessments are available in Gunter Vogt, "Ökologischer Landbau im Dritten Reich," *Zeitschrift für Agrargeschichte und Agrarsoziologie* 48 (2000): 161-80; Gunter Vogt, *Entstehung und Entwicklung des ökologischen Landbaus im deutschsprachigen Raum* (Bad Dürkheim: Stiftung Ökologie und Landbau, 2000), 98-192; and Corinna Treitel, "Nature and the Nazi Diet," *Food and Foodways* 17 (2009): 139-58.

initiatives gravitated toward Nazism as a potential ally, and opens a new perspective on the tactics adopted by allegedly non-political environmentalist networks attempting to accommodate themselves to a totalitarian state. Through an analysis of the developing links between biodynamic practitioners and various Nazi agencies, I trace changes in this unfamiliar relationship through the 1930s and 1940s, along with the enigmatic affinities between these two highly unequal partners. By moving beyond the figure of Darré, the central role of mid-level actors whose significance has largely been overlooked emerges into focus.

The years after World War I saw increasing reliance on chemical fertilizers and a rising industrialization of German agriculture. Organic alternatives soon emerged to challenge this trend, harking back to earlier cultivation practices. One of these alternatives was biodynamic agriculture, initiated in 1924 by Austrian-born occultist Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), founder of the esoteric movement known as anthroposophy. Developed by his followers after Steiner's death, biodynamic methods have become one of the chief components of the contemporary organic milieu.[4] The biodynamic approach is based on a holistic view of the farm or garden as an integrated organism comprising soil, plants, animals, and various cosmic forces, with sowing and harvesting conducted according to astrological principles. Biodynamic growers reject monoculture and abjure artificial fertilizers and pesticides, relying instead on manure, compost, and a variety of homeopathic preparations meant to channel the etheric and astral energies of the earth and other celestial bodies.[5] The biodynamic emphasis on spiritual influences rather than

[4] Basic principles are outlined in Rudolf Steiner, *Agriculture: A Course of Eight Lectures* (London: Bio-Dynamic Agricultural Association, 1974). For recent overviews by adherents see Willy Schilthuis, *Biodynamic Agriculture* (Edinburgh: Floris, 2003), and John Paull, "Biodynamic Agriculture: The Journey from Koberwitz to the World, 1924-1938," *Journal of Organic Systems* 6 (2011): 27-41.

[5] For background compare Holger Kirchmann, "Biological Dynamic Farming – An Occult Form of Alternative Agriculture?" *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* 7 (1994): 173-87; Pernille Kaltoft, "Organic Farming in Late Modernity: At the Frontier of Modernity or Opposing Modernity?" *Sociologia Ruralis* 41 (2001): 146-58; Helmut Zander, *Anthroposophie in Deutschland: Theosophische Weltanschauung und gesellschaftliche*

materialist techniques aims to maintain healthier soil, produce higher quality food, and promote harmonious interaction with the natural environment.

In the 1930s, biodynamic advocates touted their version of organic agriculture as "spiritually aware peasant wisdom" in contrast to "civilization, technology, and modern urban culture."[6] They argued that chemical fertilizers diminished the quality of produce, debilitated the soil, and harmed the health of consumers. Resistance arose from mainstream agricultural circles, generating extensive and often heated criticism of biodynamic proposals before and after 1933.[7] Much of the chemical industry fiercely opposed biodynamic methods and attempted to discredit the movement as occultist charlatanry. The hostility frequently centered on basic agricultural disputes; one critic of organic cultivation championed the "achievements of chemistry and technology" against the "return to nature" propagated by biodynamic supporters.[8] Other concerns had to do with the nature of anthroposophy and its esoteric doctrines, as well as the combination of secretiveness and adulation which marked biodynamic attitudes toward Steiner and his pronouncements.[9]

Praxis 1884–1945 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 1579-1607; Matthew Reed, *Rebels for the Soil: The Rise of the Global Organic Food and Farming Movement* (London: Earthscan, 2010), 34-35, 43-44, 78-79.

[6] Kurt Willmann, "Vom Wesen des deutschen Bauerntums," *Demeter*, August 1939, 147. Principal Nazi-era biodynamic publications include Erhard Bartsch, *Die biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise: Überwindung des Materialismus in Landwirtschaft und Gartenbau* (Dresden: Emil Weise, 1934); Franz Dreidax, *Das Bauen im Lebendigen: Eine Einführung in die biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise* (Dresden: Müller, 1939); Franz Lippert, *Zur Praxis des Heilpflanzenanbaus* (Dresden: Müller, 1939); Hellmut Bartsch and Franz Dreidax, *Der lebendige Dünger* (Planegg: Müller, 1941).

[7] Cf. Vogt, *Entstehung und Entwicklung des ökologischen Landbaus*, 117-21, and Frank Uekötter, *Die Wahrheit ist auf dem Feld: Eine Wissensgeschichte der deutschen Landwirtschaft* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010), 232-40 and 413-22. For anthroposophist accounts see Herbert Koepf and Bodo von Plato, *Die biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise im 20. Jahrhundert: Die Entwicklungsgeschichte der biologisch-dynamischen Landwirtschaft* (Dornach: Verlag am Goetheanum, 2001); F.C.L. Schmidt, ed., *Der landwirtschaftliche Impuls Rudolf Steiners und seine Entfaltung während der Tätigkeit des 'Versuchsringes Anthroposophischer Landwirte in Deutschland' 1924 – 1945* (Birenbach: Werner Müller, n.d.); Uwe Werner, *Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1999), 82-93, 266-86.

[8] Alfred Steven, "Stellungnahme zur Frage: Biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise," Bundesarchiv Berlin (hereafter BA), R3602/2609, a 145 page typescript from 1941 which recapitulates earlier critiques.

[9] For an internal account see John Paull, "The Secrets of Koberwitz: The Diffusion of Rudolf Steiner's Agriculture Course and the Founding of Biodynamic Agriculture" *Journal of Social Research & Policy* 2 (2011): 19-29.

Steiner's followers, however, had friends in high places. In 1927 biodynamic producers organized into a cooperative with the help of Georg Michaelis, former chancellor of the German Reich. By 1932 the most prominent outlets for biodynamic marketing were the Demeter line of organic food products and Weleda cosmetics and pharmaceuticals, both of which continue to thrive today. When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the biodynamic movement was well positioned to become the predominant form of organic agriculture in Germany. Other types of organic farming active at the time were not as organizationally established and not as successful at promoting their alternative models, and largely failed to secure the protection of Nazi patrons.[10]

Biodynamic Farming in the Third Reich

In July 1933 biodynamic growers founded the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture under the leadership of anthroposophist Erhard Bartsch, with headquarters at Bartsch's estate in the rural community of Bad Saarow in Brandenburg near Berlin.[11] The movement initially viewed Nazi agrarian policy as vindication against their adversaries, but during the first year of the new regime faced intense opposition from several regional Nazi leaders.[12] In part due to lobbying by the chemical industry, the movement was banned in Thuringia in November 1933;

[10] Other forms of organic farming included Ewald Könemann's method of "biological cultivation" and Wilhelm Büsselberg's "natural farming"; for background see Vogt, *Entstehung und Entwicklung des ökologischen Landbaus*, 60-97. Vogt does not mention Hermann Denstädt's agricultural technique rejecting artificial fertilizers in favor of "living bacterial soil." Denstädt died in 1936; his approach was championed by Nazi demagogue Julius Streicher for a time. The biodynamic farmers league also sought and gained Streicher's support; see Gauleitung Franken to Erhard Bartsch, February 11, 1938, BA R9349/3/S. Könemann's method, outlined in his periodical *Bebauet die Erde*, was substantively similar to biodynamics but maintained ideological distance from Steiner's followers. Büsselberg, director of a "Research Institute for Natural Farming" in Nuremberg, eagerly sought cooperation with biodynamic advocates but was rebuffed. For context see BA DS/B27: 2452-2462.

[11] An organizational diagram of the Reichsverband für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise can be found in BA R58/6223/1: 246, and the group's statutes are in BA R58/6197/1: 91.

[12] Erhard Bartsch, "Betriebs-Autarkie," *Demeter*, March 1933, 41-45; cf. Bartsch, "Was ist biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise?" *Natur und Kultur*, April 1938, 117-18. For additional details on opponents of biodynamics see the December 1934 "Geschäftsbericht des Reichsverbandes für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise," BA R58/6197/1: 186-93.

the ban was rescinded a year later.[13] Initial setbacks notwithstanding, the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture grew considerably during the Third Reich and soon added an array of Nazi luminaries to its roster of supporters. As early as April 1934, Nazi Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick visited Bartsch's biodynamic estate and expressed his support for the organization. He was followed by a parade of similarly high-profile figures, including Rudolf Hess, Robert Ley, and Alfred Rosenberg, who were guests at biodynamic headquarters in Bad Saarow and voiced their support for the undertaking.[14]

Representatives of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture publicized the achievements of their organic farming methods in various media, highlighting the virtues of a natural approach to growing food for the revitalization of the German nation. They claimed that biodynamic farms enjoyed more abundant harvests and produced higher quality crops than conventional agriculture, adding that organic procedures were more efficient, healthier, and more conducive to the wellbeing of the peasantry and the German people at large.[15] Depicting the farm as a unified organism, Bartsch disdained the "Americanization and mechanization of agriculture" as hazardous to "German peasant life" and its connection to "the living soil." He affirmed Germany's right to *Lebensraum* or living space and completely rejected monoculture, synthetic fertilizers, and chemical pest control. According to Bartsch, "love of nature" was anchored in "the German essence," and biodynamic farming was the "natural method" most suitable to

[13] See the December 20, 1934 "Verordnung über die Aufhebung der Landespolizeiverordnung über die biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise vom 15. November 1933," in *Gesetzsammlung für Thüringen* 43 (December 1934), 151. The reversal of the ban was ordered by Minister of the Interior Wilhelm Frick.

[14] On the growth of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture see the November 1939 audit of the organization, BA R58/6197/1: 40-43; on the degree of Nazi support for the group see the "Geschäftsbericht 1935/36 des Reichsverbandes für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise" and the "Geschäftsbericht 1939/40," BA R58/6197/1: 107-09 and 141-43, as well as the report "Tagung des Reichsverbandes," in *Demeter*, December 1935, 205-06, and Herman Polzer, "Reichstagung für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise," *Leib und Leben*, January 1936, 18-19.

[15] Carl Grund, "Untersuchungen von Leistungen biologisch-dynamisch geführter Betriebe," Januar 12, 1941, BA NS15/305: 57140-62; Nicolaus Remer, "Biologisch-dynamische Aufbauarbeit," *Demeter*, November 1940, 101-12.

"preserving the German landscape." The biodynamic approach, he declared, "awakens a genuine love for Mother Earth."[16]

Such arguments reflected a vision of alternative agriculture as a path to preserving and improving both soil and spirit, overcoming the damaging effects of modern technology and industry while restoring rural communities living in balance with the land. Biodynamic practitioners promoted their methods as an "organic integration of agriculture, village, landscape, and homeland."[17] These views were challenged by a variety of agricultural experts who cast doubt on the claim that biodynamic cultivation led to increased yields, and took exception to biodynamic teachings about cosmic forces and the reliance on astrological and homeopathic principles.[18] Severe criticisms along these lines were aired at the beginning of the 1930s, before the Nazis came to power, and continued to hamper biodynamic efforts during the early years of the new regime. By the end of the decade, however, anthroposophist models of organic farming gained additional admirers in Nazi circles.

From 1933 onward, in the face of opposition from various quarters, biodynamic proponents highlighted the positive opportunities presented by the rise of Nazism. Writing in *Demeter*, the biodynamic journal, anthroposophist authors emphasized Nazi attempts to attain agricultural autarky for Germany.[19] The front cover of the May 1939 issue featured a bucolic picture of Adolf Hitler in an alpine landscape, surrounded by children, in honor of the Führer's fiftieth birthday. *Demeter* also celebrated the annexation of Austria and the Sudetenland, the German attack on Poland, the fall of France, and various German military victories. The journal

[16] Erhard Bartsch, "Wesen und Wert der biologisch-dynamischen Wirtschaftsweise" December 1938, BA R58/7234.
[17] Immanuel Voegele and Kurt Willmann, January 24, 1940, BA NS15/304: 57123.
[18] Examples of the wide-ranging debates between biodynamic spokesmen and representatives of the agricultural establishment can be found in the 1930-1940 records of the Biologische Reichsanstalt für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, BA R3602/2608.
[19] See e.g. Erhard Bartsch, "Zurück zum Agrarstaat," *Demeter*, September 1933, 163-64; "Beitrag zum Autarkieproblem," *Demeter*, August 1933, 139-42; Franz Dreidax, "Heimatpflege und Landwirtschaft," *Demeter*, September 1933, 187-92.

blamed England for starting the war and called for using prisoners of war in environmental projects.[20] In the wake of such efforts, the biodynamic movement received extensive praise in the Nazi press, from the chief Nazi newspaper, the *Völkischer Beobachter*, to rural venues and health periodicals.[21] Biodynamic practices were lauded by high-level representatives of Nazi agricultural policy such as Reichstag member and SS colonel Hermann Schneider, former Reich Inspector for the Battle of Production, the Nazi program for agricultural autarky.[22] Even staff members of the Wehrmacht high command supported biodynamics.[23]

Beginning in 1934, a crucial source of institutional backing for the biodynamic movement came from Nazi officials overseeing the party's *Lebensreform* or life reform efforts, one of the lesser-known facets of National Socialist policy. Life reform encompassed a range of alternative traditions including back to the land projects, nutritional reform proposals, natural healing methods, vegetarian and animal protection societies, and experiments in non-conventional agriculture.[24] Under Nazi auspices, such endeavors were incorporated into a campaign for a healthier and more vigorous German nation. A chief proponent of this approach was Hanns Georg Müller, head of the official Nazi life reform organization, the *Deutsche*

[20] For representative examples see the opening articles in the September 1939 and 1940 issues of *Demeter*, as well as *Demeter* July 1940, 64, and *Demeter* October 1940, 99.
[21] Examples include Oskar Krüger, "Neue Wege des Landbaues," *Völkischer Beobachter*, August 28, 1940, a lengthy and glowing portrait of biodynamics; Wolfgang Clauß, "Lebensgesetzliche Landbauweise: Eindrücke von einer Besichtigung des Erbhofes Marienhöhe bei Bad Saarow," *Nationalsozialistische Landpost*, July 26, 1940; Edmund Sala, "Die Natur als Erzieher," *Die Grüne Post*, November 24, 1940; Käthe Wietfeld, "Volkskraft und Volksgesundheit," *Gesundes Leben*, March 1940, 60.
[22] See e.g. Hermann Schneider, *Schicksalsgemeinschaft Europa: Leben und Nahrung aus der europäischen Scholle* (Breslau: Gutsmann, 1941), 89-102, and Schneider's correspondence in support of biodynamics, BA R9349/3/Sch. Schneider visited Bartsch's estate as Darré's representative in 1939 (BA R58/6223/1: 301).
[23] For example, Wehrwirtschaftsstab beim Oberkommando der Wehrmacht to Stabsamt des Reichsbauernführers, October 7, 1939, BA R58/6223/1: 331, reporting that the Wehrmacht supreme command supports "the biodynamic method of cultivation."
[24] Cf. Eva Barlösius, *Naturgemäße Lebensführung: Zur Geschichte der Lebensreform um die Jahrhundertwende* (Frankfurt: Campus, 1997); Diethart Kerbs and Jürgen Reulecke, eds., *Handbuch der deutschen Reformbewegungen 1880-1933* (Wuppertal: Hammer, 1998); Kai Buchholz, ed., *Die Lebensreform: Entwürfe zur Neugestaltung von Leben und Kunst um 1900* (Darmstadt: Häusser, 2001); Matthew Jefferies, "Lebensreform: A Middle-Class Antidote to Wilhelminism?" in *Wilhelminism and its Legacies: German Modernities, Imperialism, and the Meanings of Reform, 1890-1930*, ed. Geoff Eley and James Retallack (New York: Berghahn, 2003), 91-106; Florentine Fritzen, *Gesünder Leben: Die Lebensreformbewegung im 20. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006).

Gesellschaft für Lebensreform, founded on the principle that "the worldview of the German life reform movement is National Socialism."[25] Müller coordinated various alternative movements from his position as a functionary in the Nazi party directorate.

Müller was an avid supporter of biodynamic farming, issuing a series of biodynamic books and pamphlets in his publishing house and strongly promoting biodynamics in the journal he edited, *Leib und Leben*. The journal took a zealous National Socialist line, condemning errant life reform groups for insufficient commitment to Nazism. Dozens of celebratory articles on biodynamics appeared in its pages, alongside promotions of Demeter and Weleda products. *Leib und Leben* and *Demeter* were sister journals and routinely advertised for one another. Biodynamic spokesmen were among the most frequent authors in Müller's periodical, highlighting the congruence of National Socialist ideals with biodynamic practices. Biodynamic farmers were presented as pioneers of the natural German method of cultivation that had finally come into its own under the leadership of the Third Reich.[26] According to its sponsors, the biodynamic movement "stands for the same position as National Socialism regarding the peasantry and its significance for our nation."[27]

The encouragement was by no means merely rhetorical. Müller repeatedly used his position in the party directorate to intercede on behalf of biodynamic growers, providing tangible backing for organic projects in the name of the Nazi party. In 1938, for instance, he successfully

[25] For context see Wolfgang Krabbe, "'Die Weltanschauung der Deutschen Lebensreformbewegung ist der Nationalsozialismus': Zur Gleichschaltung einer Alternativströmung im Dritten Reich," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 71 (1989): 431-61. Ample documentation of the long-running cooperation between the Nazi *Lebensreform* agency and the biodynamic movement can be found in Hanns Georg Müller's 1934-1940 correspondence with the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture, BA R9349/1 and BA R9349/3/M.

[26] See e.g. Dr. von Kapff, "Künstliche, chemische Düngung oder natürliche Wirtschaftsweise?" *Leib und Leben*, September 1935, 260-63; Herman Polzer, "Erfolgreiche Auswirkungen der biologisch-dynamischen Wirtschaftsweise," *Leib und Leben*, January 1937, 46-48; Franz Dreidax, "Lebendiger Boden – ewiges Volk," *Leib und Leben*, October 1938, 199-205; Franz Lippert, "Der Bauerngarten," *Leib und Leben*, June 1941, 80-81.

[27] Robert Banfield, "Landwirtschaftliche Tagung für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise," *Leib und Leben*, January 1935, 18.

intervened with the national potato producers guild to obtain favorable treatment for Demeter products.[28] Müller also intervened with the national association of grain producers and the Reich Commissar for Price Regulation, among others. Biodynamic planters thus reaped economic benefits from their association with Nazi officials.

Beyond measures such as these, Müller and his colleagues welcomed the biodynamic movement as a leading force in the Nazi life reform apparatus. In February 1935 the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture became a corporative member of the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Lebensreform*, and two prominent biodynamic advocates, Erhard Bartsch and Franz Dreidax, joined the organization's executive council. Dreidax and Bartsch served as active leaders of the party's life reform association for years, promoting its ideal of a "harmony of blood, soil, and cosmos."[29] In 1937 Bartsch boasted that "the leading men of the Demeter movement have put themselves, their knowledge and experience wholeheartedly at the service of National Socialist Germany."[30]

A further area in which proponents of biodynamic cultivation influenced Nazi policies was the enforcement of environmental standards in building projects, most famously the construction of the Autobahn system from 1934 onward. This work was overseen by a coterie of "advocates for the landscape" under the direction of Alwin Seifert, whose official title was Reich Advocate for the Landscape.[31] Their declared task was to preserve wetlands and environmentally

[28] For details see the 1938 correspondence from Müller's office in the files of the Reichsverband für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise, BA R9349/1.
[29] "Kundgebung der Deutschen Lebensreform-Bewegung," *Demeter*, September 1937, 155.
[30] Erhard Bartsch to Lotar Eickhoff, August 22, 1937, BA R9349/2. Cf. Erhard Bartsch, "Haltet den Boden gesund!" *Demeter*, January 1938, 1; "Kulturschaffendes Bauerntum," *Demeter*, January 1941, 1-2.
[31] On Seifert compare Charlotte Reitsam, *Das Konzept der 'bodenständigen Gartenkunst' Alwin Seiferts* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2001); Thomas Zeller, "Molding the Landscape of Nazi Environmentalism: Alwin Seifert and the Third Reich," in *How Green were the Nazis*, ed. Brüggemeier, Cioc, and Zeller, 147-70; Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, "Biodynamischer Gartenbau, Landschaftsarchitektur und Nationalsozialismus," *Das Gartenamt*, September 1993, 590-95, and October 1993, 638-42. Primary sources include Alwin Seifert, "Natur als harmonisches Ganzes," *Leib und Leben*, May 1937, 115-17; Seifert, "Von der Muttererde," *Der Schulungsbrief: Das zentrale Monatsblatt der*

sensitive areas of the countryside, ensure that public works projects were ecologically sustainable, and embed the new Autobahn roadways harmoniously into the surrounding landscape. While their concrete achievements may have been marginal, Seifert has been described as "the most prominent environmentalist in the Third Reich."[32] An influential advisor to Reich Minister Fritz Todt, Seifert designed the biodynamic garden at Rudolf Hess's villa and was a fervent promoter of biodynamic methods from 1930 onward, using his position to further the goals of the biodynamic movement with the support of Hess, Müller and others.[33] He characterized his own organic and ecological stance as "National Socialist through and through."[34]

Several biodynamic practitioners worked as "advocates for the landscape" under Seifert, including Hinrich Meyer-Jungclaussen, member of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture, and anthroposophist Max Karl Schwarz, an important publicist for biodynamic principles. Schwartz introduced Seifert to biodynamic practices in 1930 and maintained extensive contacts in the Nazi hierarchy.[35] In 1939 he reported with pride that "the tools of biodynamic cultivation" were a decisive factor in securing conservation measures on the

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NSDAP, November 1938, 373-77; Seifert, "Die lebensgesetzliche Landbauweise," *Die Strasse*, August 1940, 350; Seifert, *Im Zeitalter des Lebendigen: Natur, Heimat, Technik* (Planegg: Müller, 1941).

[32] Zeller, "Molding the Landscape of Nazi Environmentalism," 148. For context on the Autobahn project compare Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, "Political Landscapes and Technology: Nazi Germany and the Landscape Design of the *Reichsautobahnen*," *CELA Annual Conference Papers* (1995); William Rollins, "Whose Landscape? Technology, Fascism, and Environmentalism on the National Socialist Autobahn," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 85 (1995): 494-520; Dietmar Klenke, "Autobahnbau und Naturschutz in Deutschland," in *Politische Zäsuren und gesellschaftlicher Wandel im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Matthias Frese and Michael Prinz (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1996), 465-98; Erhard Schütz, *Mythos Reichsautobahn: Bau und Inszenierung der Straßen des Führers 1933-1941* (Berlin: Links, 2000); Thomas Zeller, *Driving Germany: The Landscape of the German Autobahn, 1930-1970* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2007); Charlotte Reitsam, *Reichsautobahn-Landschaften im Spannungsfeld von Natur und Technik* (Saarbrücken: Müller, 2009).

[33] For his own account see Alwin Seifert, "Über naturnahen Gartenbau," *Leib und Leben*, August 1942, 67-69. Details on Seifert's vision of combining National Socialism and organic agriculture can be found in his May 1941 manifesto "Die bäuerlich-unabhängige Landbauweise," Bundesarchiv Koblenz (hereafter BAK), N1094/II/1.

[34] Alwin Seifert, "Natur und Technik im deutchen Straßenbau," *Leib und Leben*, July 1937, 129. Details on the environmental aspects of the Autobahn project can be found in the extensive 1933-1941 correspondence between Seifert and Todt in BA NS26/1188.

[35] Seifert to Darré, June 12, 1941, BAK N1094/II/1.

Autobahn project through "the development of a landscape praxis."[36] Unlike Seifert, Schwarz did not become a party member, but he actively supported Nazism and has been characterized as "a dedicated proponent of National Socialist blood and soil ideology."[37] In their efforts to give the slogan "blood and soil" practical meaning, these biodynamically inspired advocates for the landscape fused environmental and national sentiments, a combination which reverberated far beyond the limited milieu of organic growers and their supporters. The lead article in the September 1940 issue of *Demeter* declared that the task of the biodynamic movement was to "awaken love for the soil and love for the homeland: This must be our goal and our lofty mission, to fight together with our Führer Adolf Hitler for the liberation of our beloved German fatherland!"[38]

Disputes over Organic Agriculture

From the viewpoint of its major protagonists, biodynamics appeared to be eminently compatible with National Socialism. In May 1935, the head of the Anthroposophical Society in Germany pointed to "the large number of respected party members" among biodynamic farmers.[39] Nazi supporters of biodynamics applauded the anthroposophist style of organic farming as a powerful weapon "in the National Socialist struggle against intellectualism and

[36] Max Karl Schwarz, "Bildekräfte im Lebensraum der Landschaft" *Demeter* April 1939, 59-66; cf. Max Karl Schwarz, "Aus dem Aufgabengebiet des Landschaftsanwaltes beim Bau der Reichsautobahnen" *Gartenkunst* February 1942, 18-23. On the proportion of anthroposophists among the "landscape advocates" on the Autobahn project see Zeller, *Driving Germany*, 87-88.
[37] Gert Gröning and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn, *Grüne Biographien: Biographisches Handbuch zur Landschaftsarchitektur des 20. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland* (Berlin: Patzer, 1997), 358. A 1937 Gestapo evaluation of Schwarz stated: "He does not belong to the party, but he supports the National Socialist movement." (BA R58/6195/1: 439) His publications include Max Karl Schwarz, *Obstbau unter Berücksichtigung der biologisch-dynamischen Wirtschaftsweise* (Dresden: Müller, 1939); Schwarz, *Zur landschaftlichen Ausgestaltung der Straßen in Norddeutschland* (Berlin: Volk und Reich Verlag, 1940); Schwarz, "Zum Grünaufbau im ostdeutschen Raum," *Die Strasse*, April 1940, 150-54; Schwarz, "Zeitgemäße Gedanken über Garten- und Landschaftsgestaltung," *Gartenbau im Reich*, June 1942, 94-95.
[38] Bruno Bauch, "Betriebsbericht aus Sachsen," *Demeter*, September 1940, 84.
[39] Hermann Poppelbaum to the Stab des Stellvertreters des Führers, May 22, 1935, BA R58/6193: 427.

materialism, which are alien to our people."[40] For most of the 1930s, however, the biodynamic movement failed to win the coveted support of Darré, the Nazi minister of agriculture. Chief popularizer of the blood and soil worldview, Darré fulfilled multiple roles in the Third Reich. In addition to his ministerial duties, he directed the party's agrarian apparatus, served as head of the Reich Food Estate, and carried the title of Reich Peasant Leader.[41] Darré focused on achieving increased agricultural productivity and reversing the demographic trend toward urbanization, as well as restoring rural values and encouraging a return to agrarian customs through various settlement schemes and legislation regulating the inheritance of farmland. These policies were meant to strengthen a Germanic unity of blood and soil embodied in a racially healthy peasant stock and its care for the landscape. Darré's theories legitimated the push for *Lebensraum* and colonization of territory in Eastern Europe. His effective power diminished in the course of the 1930s, particularly in the wake of a 1938 falling out with Heinrich Himmler, and he was de facto replaced by his subordinate, Herbert Backe, in May 1942.[42]

Although biodynamic ideals converged with several of Darré's core ideas, such as a hoped-for return to an agrarian social order, pastoral romanticism paired with hostility toward materialism, and the vision of a simpler and healthier rural life, he was initially skeptical toward biodynamic farming and its anthroposophical basis. While Hess deterred him from interfering

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[40] Franz Zeno Diemer to Hermann Reischle, July 5, 1941, BAK N1094/II/1.

[41] For background cf. Clifford Lovin, "Blut und Boden: The Ideological Basis of the Nazi Agricultural Program," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 28 (1967): 279-88; Mathias Eidenbenz, *"Blut und Boden": Zu Funktion und Genese der Metaphern des Agrarismus und Biologismus in der nationalsozialistischen Bauernpropaganda R. W. Darrés* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1993); Gustavo Corni and Herbert Gies, *'Blut und Boden': Rassenideologie und Agrarpolitik im Staat Hitlers* (Idstein: Schulz-Kirchner Verlag, 1994); Frank-Lothar Kroll, *Utopie als Ideologie: Geschichtsdenken und politisches Handeln im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1998), 157-205; Andrea D'Onofrio, "Rassenzucht und Lebensraum: Zwei Grundlagen im Blut- und Boden- Gedanken von Richard Walther Darré," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 49 (2001): 141-57; Andrea D'Onofrio, *Razza, sangue e suolo: Utopie della razza e progetti eugenetici nel ruralismo nazista* (Naples: ClioPress, 2007).

[42] General context on Nazi agricultural policy is available in J.E. Farquharson, *The Plough and the Swastika: The NSDAP and Agriculture in Germany, 1928-45* (London: Sage, 1976); Friedrich Grundmann, *Agrarpolitik im 'Dritten Reich'* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1979); Gustavo Corni, *Hitler and the Peasants: Agrarian Policy of the Third Reich, 1930-1939* (New York: Berg, 1990); Adam Tooze, "Saving the Peasants" in Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy* (New York: Viking, 2006), 166-99.

with Steiner's followers, Darré looked askance at their claims of efficiency, fertility, and quality, and was decidedly unsympathetic toward biodynamic efforts to curry favor within his network of agricultural institutions. Darré also feuded with Seifert in 1936-37, further distancing him from the biodynamic movement.[43] His attitude began to shift in early 1939, due in part to economic exigencies – organic farming held the promise of independence from imported petroleum and other products – and in part to the patient but persistent work of anthroposophist members of his staff and their allies in the far-flung apparatus he oversaw.

Through a gradual series of steps, including invitations to agricultural officials to visit biodynamic farms and acquaint themselves with their procedures and results, a pro-biodynamic faction emerged among the higher-level personnel around Darré.[44] But a number of powerful figures remained obdurately opposed to biodynamics, from Backe to agriculture expert Konrad Meyer, and for a time in the late 1930s biodynamic growers feared their methods would be forbidden.[45] Darré himself came to their aid with an announcement in January 1940 that biodynamic cultivation deserved careful consideration and could potentially constitute an equal partner with conventional farming in "maintaining and enhancing the productive capacity of the German soil."[46] In June 1940 the minister of agriculture was guest of honor at Bartsch's estate, and within a year he declared that biodynamic farming was the only route to "the biological salvation of Europe."[47]

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[43] See e.g. Darré to Todt, January 15, 1937, BA NS10/29: 12-17, outlining his strong disagreements with Seifert.
[44] For a first-hand account of the steps leading toward the reversal in Darré's views on biodynamic farming see Georg Halbe, "Bericht über die Entwicklung der Beziehungen zwischen dem Stabsamt des Reichsbauernführers und dem Reichsverband für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise," BAK N1094/II/1, undated four page typescript, probably from late 1940. The details of Halbe's report are corroborated by Erhard Bartsch's June 1941 SD interrogation, BA R58/6223/1: 299-305.
[45] On Backe's vehement opposition to biodynamics see his 1933-42 correspondence with Darré, BAK N1094/II/20.
[46] "Um die biologisch-dynamische Düngungsweise: Eine Erklärung des Reichsernährungsministers," *Die Landware*, January 20, 1940.
[47] Darré to Seifert, May 28, 1941, BAK N1094/II/1. Darré often modified his claims depending on the audience and the occasion, making it difficult to determine with precision his actual attitude toward biodynamics at any given

From 1940 onward, Darré and members of his entourage attempted to provide concrete support for biodynamic producers and make organic food an integral part of Germany's wartime economy. As his institutional power dwindled and his own position became more precarious, he went to elaborate lengths to circumvent Backe and other anti-biodynamic officials in the agriculture ministry and the Reich Food Estate. Darré and the biodynamic supporters on his staff set up a series of innocuously named semi-private associations to help sustain the initiatives of Bartsch, Dreidax, Seifert and their fellows, with personnel chosen for their loyalty to Darré and their sympathy for biodynamics.[48] These included staff members serving in the office of the Reich Peasant Leader and the Nazi party's Office of Agrarian Policy who were committed to biodynamic agriculture. Darré adopted the phrase "farming according to the laws of life" (*lebensgesetzlicher Landbau*) as a euphemism for biodynamics; the terms were often used interchangeably. These measures showed some success for a time; in June 1941 Darré noted with satisfaction that "several circles within the highest leadership of the Nazi party have come to endorse biodynamic agriculture."[49]

But Darré's plans for large-scale sponsorship of organic farming eventually came to naught. In the context of the war and his own waning influence, even the concerted efforts of a

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time. While he told outsiders and skeptics that he saw biodynamic farming as *one* way out of the crisis of industrial agriculture, not necessarily *the* way, his communications with biodynamic supporters were more pointed and more sweeping, portraying biodynamic agriculture as the only hope for saving the Western world. Darré also directly promoted biodynamic literature and distributed it to other Nazi leaders; see e.g. Darré to Rosenberg, July 24, 1940, BA NS8/173: 44.

[48] The primary vehicle was the *Verein für Bauerntumskunde*, re-named *Gesellschaft der Freunde des deutschen Bauerntums* in October 1940, with Darré as president throughout. In 1939 Darré established an organic farming working group, the "Arbeitsgemeinschaft Lebensgesetzlicher Landbau: Die biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise," with Hermann Reischle as its leader and many biodynamic representatives among its members, including Erhard Bartsch, Franz Dreidax, Carl Grund, Hans Merkel, and Ernst Stegemann. For details see Wilhelm Kinkelin to Reischle, November 27, 1939, and Karl August Rust to Seifert, June 16, 1941, BAK N1094/II/1; a retrospective overview is available in Merkel to Büttner, November 29, 1951, BAK N1094 I/2: 81. Other biodynamic supporters on Darré's staff included Wilhelm Rauber, Günther Pacyna, Reinhard Ohnesorge, and Wilhelm Driehaus.

[49] Darré, "Anordnung für den persönlichen Stab," June 7, 1941, BAK N1094/II/1d. By this time, Nazi opponents of anthroposophy viewed Darré as "a dedicated adherent of biodynamic methods." (SD Vermerk, June 20, 1941, BA R58/6223/1: 218)

Reich Minister were of little use. The meager practical outcome of such endeavors has partly obscured the significance of the shift in official attitudes toward biodynamic agriculture. Some Nazi supporters of biodynamic methods were undoubtedly motivated by wartime concerns over the availability of raw materials rather than any interest in organic techniques as such, and this practical support did not indicate approval of either ecological or esoteric precepts. Indeed Nazi patrons of biodynamic cultivation were often indifferent at best to its occult underpinnings and unconcerned with its environmental implications. Moreover, Steiner's variant of organic farming had numerous enemies; aside from Backe's opposition and resistance from the chemical lobby, the biodynamic movement faced tenacious antagonists in the Gestapo and *Sicherheitsdienst* (the SD or Nazi security service), who hounded all groups with occultist affiliations as a danger to the nation.[50]

In the eyes of Reinhard Heydrich, who oversaw the SD and Gestapo, biodynamic farming was of minimal agricultural interest but was instead a pretense for promoting the treacherous tenets of anthroposophy in organic guise. Behind the veil of an appealing rural vision and professed peasant values, Heydrich warned, lurked a conspiracy to undermine National Socialism from within. Occult groups were perceived as a threat because of both their aloofness from popular concerns and their suspiciously patriotic rhetoric.[51] In a 1941 letter to Darré, Heydrich depicted anthroposophy as a menacing sect unfit for the new Germany, an elite and foreign belief system committed to its own dubious dogma. For Heydrich, anthroposophy was "not a worldview for the whole people, but a special doctrine for a narrow and limited circle of individuals, a doctrine which endangers National Socialism." He found its ostentatiously German

[50] Heydrich to Darré, October 18, 1941, "Betrifft: Anhänger der biologisch-dynamischen Wirtschaftsweise," BA R16/1272; July 1941 SD memorandum "Bericht über den Reichsverband für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise," BA R58/1: 226-42.
[51] Peter Staudenmaier, "Nazi Perceptions of Esotericism: The Occult as Fascination and Menace" in *The Threat and Allure of the Magical*, ed. Ashwin Manthripragada (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 24-58.

character particularly suspect: “It is part of the entire attitude of anthroposophy to present itself as very nationalist and German-centered, and to give the external impression of political irreproachability, but in its fundamental essence it represents a dangerous form of Oriental corruption of our Germanic ethnic group.”[52]

The intensity of opposition to biodynamic procedures on the part of these guardians of National Socialist purity stood in stark disproportion to the peripheral status of organic practices within Nazi agricultural policy as a whole. What aroused the ire of Heydrich and his underlings was the fact that Steiner’s followers received active support from other Nazi agencies, regardless of the limited success of organic initiatives in gaining institutional traction. Whatever their effectiveness may have been, the actions of Nazi authorities on behalf of the biodynamic movement merit historical attention beyond the level of high-profile individuals like Darré and Hess. Less visible but nonetheless influential Nazi officials were equally important to biodynamic growers in negotiating the uncertain terrain of the Third Reich. Examples include Nazi philosopher Alfred Baeumler, a high-ranking member of Rosenberg’s staff, whom biodynamic leaders considered an ally, and Darré’s collaborator Rudi Peuckert, head of the Reich Office for Agrarian Policy, who was a biodynamic practitioner himself.[53] The contours of this unusual encounter between biodynamic aspirations and Nazi realities can be traced more concretely in the careers of two of Darré’s aides, anthroposophists Georg Halbe and Hans Merkel.

Both Halbe and Merkel served on Darré’s personal staff in the office of the Reich Peasant Leader. Halbe worked for Darré from 1935 to 1942, concentrating on publishing projects. He

[52] Heydrich to Darré, October 18, 1941, BA R16/1272.
[53] See e.g. Peuckert to Bartsch, August 22, 1940, BA R58/6223/1: 330, and the 1937 to 1941 correspondence between Bartsch and Baeumler in BA NS15/304. Baeumler and Peuckert were also regular visitors at Bartsch’s estate. On Baeumler’s ambivalent attitude see his unfinished memorandum “Über die biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise” from December 1940, BA NS15/305: 57711-23.

was a staff member at Darré's journal *Odal: Zeitschrift für Blut und Boden* and manager of the "Blood and Soil" publishing house. One of his chief tasks as an employee of the Reich Food Estate was promoting organic farming in its biodynamic form.[54] Halbe wrote dozens of articles for a wide range of Nazi publications, including essays on organic agriculture.[55] In 1942 he planned to publish a book on the topic in Hanns Georg Müller's publishing house, but the work did not appear in print.[56] His writings combined agrarian romanticism, antisemitism, Germanic myths, a fondness for holism, and emphatic commitment to National Socialism.[57] When Backe replaced Darré in 1942, Halbe left the agricultural apparatus and moved to the Ministry for the Occupied Eastern Territories, and then to the Propaganda Ministry in March 1944.

Halbe's colleague Hans Merkel, a specialist in agrarian law, supervised the Reich Peasant Leader's personal staff. Initially recruited in 1934 by Darré's assistant Hermann Reischle, an SS officer in the Reich Office for Agrarian Policy who coordinated the pro-biodynamic grouping of Nazi agricultural functionaries, Merkel was also a leader of the SS Office of Race and Settlement, the foremost model of Darré's blood and soil doctrines and the institutional embodiment of Nazi racialism and ruralism. He published widely on Nazi agrarian policy and wrote regularly for *Odal*, combining organic metaphors with calls for expanded German *Lebensraum*. A faithful spokesman for Darré's ideas and a primary proponent of biodynamic

[54] See Halbe's handwritten *Lebenslauf* dated August 14, 1942, BA DS/A97: 660.
[55] Cf. Georg Halbe, "Lebensgesetzlicher Landbau," *Westermanns Monatshefte*, November 1940, 128-30.
[56] The prospective title was *Goethes Naturanschauung als ein Weg zum lebensgesetzlichen Landbau*; Halbe reported that it had been accepted for publication by the Müllersche Verlagshandlung. See Halbe's August 1942 "Verzeichnis umfangreicherer Aufsätze," BA DS/A97: 664.
[57] Georg Halbe, "Zur neuen Getreideordnung," *Deutschlands Erneuerung: Monatsschrift für das deutsche Volk*, September 1934, 552-56; Halbe, "Odal, das Lebensgesetz eines ewigen Deutschland," *Odal*, October 1935, 301-06; Halbe, "Goethes Naturanschauung und lebensgesetzlicher Landbau," *Demeter*, December 1940, 116-18; Halbe, "Die Reichsidee," *Leib und Leben*, November 1942, 89-91. He also published in *Wille und Macht*, organ of the Hitler Youth, the *Nationalsozialistische Landpost*, and the SS journal *Das schwarze Korps*.

cultivation within the Nazi agricultural apparatus, Merkel became an SS officer in 1936.[58] After the war Merkel was Darré's defense attorney at Nuremberg, portraying the former Reich Minister as an idealistic protector of organic farming and a revitalized peasantry. Merkel continued to work with Darré and other veterans of the Nazi agrarian bureaucracy in promoting biodynamics after 1945.[59]

With the assistance of Halbe, Merkel, Reischle, and like-minded colleagues on Darré's staff, biodynamic representatives were able to publicize their views in the Nazi press and gain notable sympathy and interest from the highest echelons of the party.[60] Once the war started, Darré arranged to have biodynamic leaders like Bartsch and Dreidax exempted from military service.[61] Nonetheless, the pro-organic faction in Darré's inner circle could not overcome the combined resistance of opponents of biodynamic farming within the agricultural apparatus and opponents of anthroposophy within the security services. SD agents considered biodynamic methods occultist quackery, a pointless encumbrance on traditional farming techniques, and were relentless in pursuing Steiner's followers.[62] The dispute over organic agriculture thus became entangled in the intricate controversy surrounding anthroposophy in the Third Reich.[63]

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[58] Details in Merkel's handwritten *Lebenslauf* from March 8, 1938, BA RS/D5477: 311; his SS file, BA SSO/310A: 74-114; his Office of Race and Settlement file, BA RS/D5477: 303-500; and his Reich Food Estate file, BA DS/G179: 2735-2762.

[59] The voluminous post-war correspondence between Merkel and Darré can be found in BAK N1094 I/2.

[60] Cf. Wilhelm Rauber, "Bauern 'kraft Gesetzes' oder wesenhaftes Bauerntum? Gedanken über die Notwendigkeit eines lebensgesetzlichen Landbaus," *Nationalsozialistische Monatshefte*, November 1940, 676-82; Erhard Bartsch, "Vom Wesen des Betriebsorganismus," *Odal*, April 1940, 287-90; Erhard Bartsch, "Der Erbhof Marienhöhe: Ein Beispiel lebensgesetzlicher Landbauweise," *Odal*, September 1940, 695-701; Hess to Seifert, November 14, 1938, BA R58/6223/1: 318; Reischle to Keitel, October 25, 1940, BA R58/6223/1: 328.

[61] BA R58/6223/1: 320; BA RK/I18: 11914; BA RK/I85: 1990.

[62] See e.g. the July 1941 SD report on the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture, BA R58/6223/1: 226-242, and the May 1941 report from the SD-Leitabschnitt Berlin, BA R58/5563: 35-38.

[63] On the anthroposophist movement in Nazi Germany see Peter Staudenmaier, "Der deutsche Geist am Scheideweg: Anthroposophen in Auseinandersetzung mit völkischer Bewegung und Nationalsozialismus" in *Die völkisch-religiöse Bewegung im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Uwe Puschner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 473-90.

The leaders of the biodynamic movement were committed anthroposophists. Bartsch in particular was outspoken in promoting Steiner's esoteric worldview as a profoundly German counter-weight to the materialism of the modern world and a bulwark against "the occult powers of the West." According to Bartsch, anthroposophy represented "a courageous struggle against the most dangerous enemies of the German spirit, of the German soul, of the German people."[64] In addition to biodynamic farming, Bartsch championed the full panoply of anthroposophical causes, from Waldorf schooling to Steiner's variety of holistic healing.[65] Each of these endeavors found supporters as well as adversaries within the Nazi apparatus. Anthroposophist medicine, for example, was sponsored by the Nazi party's Main Office for Public Health, and the anthroposophist physicians' organization, the League for Biodynamic Healing, was a central member of the officially sanctioned Reich Committee for a New German Art of Healing. Biodynamic treatments and Weleda products were avidly promoted in various Nazi contexts.[66] But the medical establishment mobilized against such alternative methods, and the Reich Committee for a New German Art of Healing was eventually disbanded, while the Waldorf schools were closed between 1938 and 1941 through a combination of Nazi opposition to private education and Gestapo hostility toward occult tendencies.[67]

A similar fate befell successive anthroposophist organizations. Heydrich dissolved the Anthroposophical Society in Germany in November 1935, and hoped to extend this into a ban on all anthroposophical activities. At Hess's urging, however, Himmler forbade any measures

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[64] Erhard Bartsch, "Rudolf Steiner und die Aufgaben des deutschen Volkes" July 7, 1940, BA NS15/302: 57676-97.
[65] See e.g. Erhard Bartsch to Hanns Georg Müller, May 16, 1939, and the attached minutes of the May 14, 1939 meeting with Müller in Bad Saarow, BA R9349/2/D.
[66] Cf. "Die Tagung der deutschen Naturärzte" *Der Heilpraktiker* December 15, 1934, 12; "Tagungsbericht der Hauptversammlung der Naturärzte im Rudolf-Heß-Krankenhaus" *Deutsche Volksgesundheit aus Blut und Boden* December 1934, 20-21; Karl Haedenkamp, "Volksgesundheit und Lebensführung" *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* 68 (1938), 509-12.
[67] For context see Detlef Bothe, *Neue Deutsche Heilkunde 1933–1945* (Husum: Matthiesen, 1991), and Achim Leschinsky, "Waldorfschulen im Nationalsozialismus" *Neue Sammlung: Zeitschrift für Erziehung und Gesellschaft* 23 (1983): 255-78.

against the biodynamic movement less than a month later.[68] In a sense, anthroposophy's successes after 1933 were also its downfall. Nazi officials suspicious of esoteric groups begrudged Steiner's followers their cozy relationship with other Nazis sympathetic to Waldorf schools or biodynamic farming or anthroposophical medicine. The tug-of-war between pro-anthroposophical and anti-anthroposophical factions within the regime culminated in 1941, when Hess's flight to Britain provided Heydrich the opportunity to unleash a full-scale "Campaign against occult doctrines and so-called occult sciences."[69] The Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture was dissolved in June 1941 and Bartsch and other representatives of the movement were temporarily imprisoned.[70] This was not, however, the final blow against biodynamic efforts in the Third Reich. The June 1941 actions removed the anthroposophical version of organic farming from public view, but scarcely eliminated it. Biodynamic initiatives continued apace under the unlikely protection of Himmler and the SS (*Schutzstaffel*, the Nazi paramilitary corps).

The SS Biodynamic Plantations

Since the beginning of the war, biodynamic growers had been collaborating with the SS on various projects, including plans for agricultural settlement and colonization in the occupied East.[71] In these settlement plans, Slavic populations were to be displaced by ethnic German farmers in an agrarian empire under Nazi rule. Biodynamic leaders saw the war as their chance to step forward in support of the German cause and as an auspicious occasion to re-shape Eastern

[68] Himmler's December 4, 1935 order is in BA R58/6195/2: 519.
[69] Details on the 1941 anti-occult campaign can be found in Staudenmaier, "Nazi Perceptions of Esotericism."
[70] Cf. Erhard Bartsch's June 20, 1941 Gestapo interrogation in BA R58/6223/1: 299-305, and Hans Merkel's June 24, 1941 Gestapo interrogation in BA R58/6223/1: 288-297. In a June 12, 1941 letter to Darré, Seifert speculated that the chemical industry was behind the crackdown (BAK N1094 II 1).
[71] For examples see the December 19, 1939 memorandum by Nicolaus Remer of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture; Hermann Schneider to Heinrich Himmler, December 9, 1939 (both in BA R9349/3); the May 9, 1940 report by Heinrich Vogel on biodynamics and SS settlements, BA NS3/1175; Bartsch to Hess, November 9, 1940, BA R58/6223/1: 310. Remer helped oversee agricultural production in the occupied Ukraine in 1941 and 1942.

lands along organic lines.[72] As early as October 1939, a month after the invasion of Poland, the SS requisitioned a large estate in the occupied province of Posen to turn it into an agricultural training facility based on biodynamic principles, with the active cooperation of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture.[73] Himmler's own attitude toward biodynamic farming remained ambivalent; he rejected its anthroposophical foundations but appreciated its practical potential as an alternative to conventional techniques. After the June 1941 crackdown, he ordered the agricultural sections of the SS to continue working with biodynamic methods, in cooperation with Bartsch, Dreidax, and their colleagues, but to keep these activities unobtrusive.[74] The SS consequently used the term "natural farming" (*naturgemäßer Landbau*) to designate organic agriculture.

Two of Himmler's lieutenants, Günther Pancke and Oswald Pohl, administered the SS biodynamic programs. Pancke replaced Darré as head of the SS Office of Race and Settlement in 1938 and made the agency an important part of the effort to alter conquered lands in the East according to Himmler's Germanic model. One of Pancke's goals was the establishment of agricultural estates in the Eastern territories governed by "soldier-farmers." He considered biodynamics the suitable cultivation method for this would-be vanguard, pioneers of a racially dependable armed peasantry in the ethnically cleansed East.[75] The SS sent its personnel to attend

[72] See e.g. the September 16, 1939 "Entwurf eines Briefes an Generalfeldmarschall Göring," in BA R9349/2/G; Fritz Hoffmann, "Lebensgesetzliche Grundlagen," *Leib und Leben*, November 1940, 109-10; Franz Dreidax, "Gesundes Brot aus gesundem Boden," *Leib und Leben*, September 1940, 88; Erhard Bartsch, "Der bäuerliche Erziehungsweg des deutschen Menschen," September 23, 1940, BA NS15/304: 57101-57108; Dreidax to Beckmann, September 26, 1939, BA R9349/2; Bartsch to Seifert, November 4, 1939, BA R9349/3/S.
[73] Pancke to Himmler, November 20, 1939, BA NS2/60: 51-59, reporting that the Reich Food Estate recommended biodynamic cultivation for the annexed Eastern territories because it required no artificial fertilizers.
[74] Himmler to Pohl, June 18, 1941, BA NS19/3122: 83; Brandt to Vogel, March 2, 1942, BA NS19/3122: 38. For further context on Himmler's support for biodynamics see Peter Longerich, *Heinrich Himmler: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 483-84.
[75] Pancke to Pohl, February 29, 1940, BA PK/A199: 2778; Pancke to Heydrich, January 8, 1940, BA PK/A199: 2780. For detailed background see Isabel Heinemann, *"Rasse, Siedlung, deutsches Blut": Das Rasse- und Siedlungshauptamt der SS und die rassenpolitische Neuordnung Europas* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003) and Uwe Mai, *Rasse und Raum: Agrarpolitik, Sozial- und Raumplanung im NS-Staat* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2002); on the

courses provided by the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture. Pancke's colleague Pohl was the superintendent of the economic enterprises of the SS and administrator of the concentration camp system. Pohl was a friend of Seifert and an active supporter of biodynamic agriculture, and had his own estate farmed biodynamically. He sent Himmler biodynamic literature to demonstrate its value to the SS.[76]

In January 1939, Himmler created a new SS corporation under Pohl's supervision, the *Deutsche Versuchsanstalt für Ernährung und Verpflegung* (German Research Facility for Food and Nutrition), known as the DVA. A substantial portion of its operations consisted of agricultural plantations located at concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Dachau, and Ravensbrück, as well as estates in occupied Eastern Europe and in Germany. Many of these agricultural projects were biodynamic plantations growing organic products for the SS and the German military, with production monitored by the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture. Ravensbrück was the first DVA estate to be converted to biodynamic cultivation, in May 1940.[77] Eventually the majority of the DVA's plantations were run biodynamically. The DVA also marketed Demeter products, cooperated with Weleda, and contributed financially to the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture.[78] Pohl recruited several leading biodynamic figures,

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agrarian dimensions of Nazi rule in the occupied East see Ben Kiernan, "*Blut und Boden*: Germany and Nazi Genocide," in Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 416-54; Marie-Luise Heuser, "Was grün begann endete blutigrot: Von der Naturromantik zu den Reagrarisierungs- und Entvölkerungsplänen der SA und SS," in *Industrialismus und Ökoromantik: Geschichte und Perspektiven der Ökologisierung*, ed. Dieter Hassenpflug (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 1991), 43-64; and Joachim Wolschke-Bulmahn and Gert Gröning, "Zum Verhältnis von Landschaftsplanung und Nationalsozialismus: Dargestellt an Entwicklungen während des Zweiten Weltkriegs in den 'eingegliederten Ostgebieten'," in *Naturschutz hat Geschichte*, ed. Stiftung Naturschutzgeschichte (Essen: Klartext, 2003), 163-92.

[76] Pohl to Himmler, June 17, 1940, BA NS19/3122: 80. Pohl first visited Bartsch's estate in December 1939.

[77] Bernhard Strebel, *Das KZ Ravensbrück: Geschichte eines Lagerkomplexes* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2003), 212-13. Pohl's own estate at Comthurey was located near Ravensbrück.

[78] BA R58/6197/1: 162. Further information on SS biodynamic plantations is available in Enno Georg, *Die wirtschaftlichen Unternehmungen der SS* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1963), 62-66; Hermann Kaienburg, *Die Wirtschaft der SS* (Berlin: Metropol, 2003), 771-855; Wolfgang Jacobeit and Christoph Kopke, *Die biologisch-*

including Max Karl Schwarz and Nicolaus Remer, to work on organic enterprises at Auschwitz, though Heydrich and Martin Bormann protested the employment of anthroposophists in SS ventures.[79]

The head of the DVA's agricultural section was SS officer Heinrich Vogel, a determined proponent of biodynamics even in the face of resistance from other sectors of the SS. He and Pohl insisted on relying on Bartsch's anthroposophical colleagues, and in July 1941 the SD relented, with the assurance that former members of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture would not spread Steiner's teachings.[80] The centerpiece of the DVA biodynamic operations was the sizeable plantation at Dachau, which produced medicinal herbs and other organic goods for the SS. As at Ravensbrück, the labor on the Dachau biodynamic plantation was performed by camp inmates. From 1941 onward the Dachau operation was overseen by anthroposophist Franz Lippert, a leader of the biodynamic movement from its beginnings and head gardener at Weleda from 1924 to 1940. Shortly after taking over the Dachau plantation Lippert joined the SS, and in 1944 received special recognition and a bonus for his work there.[81] Lippert published a book for the SS in 1942 based on his work at Weleda and Dachau.[82]

One of the tasks of the Dachau plantation was to train "settlers" for the Eastern territories, part of SS plans to use biodynamic cultivation in the environmental and ethnic re-ordering of the

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dynamische Wirtschaftsweise im KZ: Die Güter der 'Deutschen Versuchsanstalt für Ernährung und Verpflegung' der SS von 1939 bis 1945 (Berlin: Trafo, 1999).

[79] Heydrich to Pohl, July 4, 1941, BA R58/6223/1: 203; Bormann to Heydrich, June 28, 1941, BA R58/6223/1: 211.

[80] July 11, 1941 SD report, BA R58/6223/1: 200.

[81] BA NS3/1430: 114. For details on the Dachau plantation cf. Robert Sigel, "Heilkräuterkulturen im KZ: Die Plantage in Dachau," *Dachauer Hefte* 4 (1988): 164-73; Walter Wuttke-Groneberg, "Die Heilkräuterplantage im KZ Dachau," in *Medizin und Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Gerhard Baader (Berlin: Verlagsgesellschaft Gesundheit, 1980), 116-20; Uwe Heyll, *Wasser, Fasten, Luft und Licht: Die Geschichte der Naturheilkunde in Deutschland* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2006), 253-57; Daniella Seidl, *"Zwischen Himmel und Hölle": Das Kommando 'Plantage' des Konzentrationslagers Dachau* (Munich: Utz, 2008). According to a December 1939 DVA report, the Dachau plantation was built by camp inmates, "mainly Jews and Gypsies" (BA NS3/1433: 133).

[82] Franz Lippert, *Das Wichtigste in Kürze über Kräuter und Gewürze* (Berlin: Nordland Verlag, 1943). Nordland Verlag was the SS publishing house; the book was co-published by the DVA.

East.[83] Biodynamic leaders participated actively in these efforts, obtaining preferential treatment from the DVA and other SS agencies in return. In addition to Bartsch, Schwarz, and Remer, this initiative included Peuckert, director of the Reich Office for Agrarian Policy, who supplied forced labor from occupied lands for wartime agricultural production, and anthroposophist SS officer Carl Grund, who was specially commissioned by Himmler to assess biodynamic farming in the conquered Russian provinces in 1943.[84] On Himmler's orders, Grund was given exceptional prerogatives as an expert for "natural farming" in the East. Himmler directed that former members of the Reich League for Biodynamic Agriculture be engaged in the re-organization of agriculture in the Eastern territories and thus contribute to the "practical work of reconstruction" being carried out by German forces.[85] The DVA was still putting resources into its biodynamic projects as late as January 1945, and SS sponsorship of biodynamics continued until the camps were liberated.[86]

Organic Worldviews in Nazi Context

Whether presented as "farming according to the laws of life" or as "natural farming" or as a trustworthy method for restoring the health and fertility of the German soil and the German people, biodynamic cultivation found amenable partners in the Nazi hierarchy. It augured the return of a balanced relationship between the German nation and the German landscape, a

[83] On the role of the Dachau plantation in training settlers for the East see BA NS3/1175: 57; on Himmler's plans to use biodynamic methods in conquered Eastern territories see Seifert to Bodenstedt, April 2, 1941, BAK N1094/II/1.
[84] In October 1943 Grund was entrusted with a "Sonderauftrag des Reichsführers-SS zur Prüfung der biologisch-dynamischen Wirtschaftsweise im russischen Raum": Vogel to Brandt, Persönlicher Stab Reichsführer-SS, October 29, 1943, BA NS19/3122: 27-28. Grund was director of the Information Office for Biodynamic Agriculture, a member of the Association of Anthroposophist Farmers from 1929 onward, and a member of the Nazi party from 1933 onward. His SS title was "Referent für landwirtschaftliche Fragen" (BA SSO/40A: 853-871).
[85] Vogel to Brandt, May 15, 1943, "Betrifft: Prüfung des naturgemäßen Landbaues (früher biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise)," BA NS19/3122: 35. Grund and his colleagues ran several organic estates in formerly Polish and Ukrainian territory from autumn 1942 onward.
[86] See the September 12, 1944 DVA report on the SS's ongoing commitment to "der biologisch-dynamischen (natürlichen) Landbauweise," BA NS3/722: 8-9. The DVA was still using Weleda materials in October 1944: BA NS3/1430: 102. The January 1945 report on the DVA in BA NS3/722 shows how important their biodynamic projects were even at this late stage.

regenerated community living in harmony with nature. Anthroposophist accounts sometimes present the Third Reich as a time when the biodynamic movement flourished, with an estimated two thousand biodynamic farms and gardens in Germany by 1940.[87] Yet the movement faced conspicuous limits under Hitler's regime and provoked aggressive opposition. This mixture of achievements and constraints, of successes and failures, reflects the contrary factors impinging on the relatively small organic milieu in the Nazi era.

The comparatively favorable response Steiner's followers received in some Nazi quarters had lengthy roots. Biodynamic representatives had cultivated contacts with Nazi circles before Hitler's rise to power, and Nazi delegates were regular participants at biodynamic events from 1931 onward.[88] Biodynamic leaders like Erhard Bartsch, Wilhelm zur Linden, and Max Karl Schwarz belonged to *Freikorps* units in the early 1920s, another point of contact with the emerging Nazi movement. In the later 1920s several biodynamic promoters were active in the Artamanen, a radical blood and soil group which counted Himmler and Darré as members. According to Nazi official Herman Polzer, whose own involvement in biodynamic circles dated to 1927, the Artamanen practiced biodynamic cultivation in the late 1920s.[89] Problematic as such retrospective claims may be, they indicate the stature of biodynamics within the ruralist wing of

[87] Wilhelm zur Linden, *Blick durchs Prisma* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1965), 247. Zur Linden was chairman of the Society for the Promotion of Biodynamic Agriculture and a close associate of Erhard Bartsch. Such figures are difficult to verify; Vogt, "Ökologischer Landbau im Dritten Reich," 166 reports an increase from c. 100 biodynamic enterprises in Germany in the late 1920s to roughly 1000 by the late 1930s. Archival records confirm the basic point; the annual reports of the *Reichsverband für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise* indicate a notable rise in activity and confidence from 1933 onward. The 1939/40 report, for example, notes that "numerous new farms and gardens" had converted to biodynamic techniques during the previous year: R58/6197/1: 141.

[88] Bert Becker, *Georg Michaelis: Eine Biographie* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2007), 667. Herman Polzer, "Ein bäuerliches Kulturideal: Zur Jahrestagung für biologisch-dynamische Wirtschaftsweise in Bad Saarow," *Leib und Leben*, February 1939, 29-31, similarly emphasizes the mutually supportive relationship between biodynamic practitioners and Nazi activists before 1933.

[89] Polzer, "Ein bäuerliches Kulturideal," 31. Polzer's colleague Fritz Hugo Hoffmann, another promoter of biodynamics under Nazi auspices, had been a leader of the Artamanen. For context cf. Michael Kater, "Die Artamanen – Völkische Jugend in der Weimarer Republik" *Historische Zeitschrift* 213 (1971): 577-638; Ulrich Linse, *Zurück o Mensch zur Mutter Erde: Landkommunen in Deutschland 1890-1933* (Munich: DTV, 1983), 327-39; Stefan Brauckmann, *"Zur Saat und Tat": Die Artamanen als Gruppierung innerhalb der völkischnationalistischen Strömungen, 1924-1935* (Master's thesis, Universität Hamburg, 2005).

the Nazi movement. After 1933, Steiner's followers celebrated the contributions made by biodynamic practices to the environmental policy of the Third Reich.[90]

Practical agricultural concerns played a role in earning this positive reputation. The biodynamic technique of adding a layer of humus on top of the existing soil can be effective in retaining moisture, for example, and biodynamic advocates bragged about the thriving results on Bartsch's estate in the sandy marches of Brandenburg. Such achievements impressed visiting Nazi dignitaries even if biodynamic claims of increased productivity and enhanced quality remained controversial. More significant, however, may have been the general enthusiasm for methods offering an alternative to continued reliance on scarce resources; the self-sufficient nature of biodynamic farmsteads held considerable appeal in the search for agricultural autarky or independence from international imports, especially during wartime. Biodynamic proponents additionally succeeded in linking their efforts to popular forms of alternative medicine and nutrition sanctioned by Nazi authorities.[91]

Ideological considerations also influenced Nazi perceptions of organic farming. Even officials who came to a positive evaluation of biodynamics often maintained a skeptical view of Steiner's esoteric philosophy, and obsessive opponents of anthroposophy like Heydrich and his allies objected vehemently to its occult character. But anthroposophists were simultaneously able to draw on a common reserve of German nationalist themes, emphasizing their opposition to materialism and their vision of national regeneration and spiritual renewal as important affinities with National Socialist thought. These factors have not received adequate attention in previous accounts of the topic. The pioneering research of historian Gunter Vogt, for example, concluded

[90] Cf. Erhard Bartsch, "Der Impuls der biologisch-dynamischen Wirtschaftsweise," *Demeter*, June 1937, 93-95; Franz Dreidax, "Jahrestagung der Lebensreform in Innsbruck August 1938," *Demeter*, October 1938, 178-79.
[91] For background compare Robert Proctor, "The Nazi Diet," in Proctor, *The Nazi War on Cancer* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 120-72; Judith Baumgartner, *Ernährungsreform - Antwort auf Industrialisierung und Ernährungswandel* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1992), 55-57; and Bothe, *Neue Deutsche Heilkunde 1933–1945*, 220-26.

that there were no "ideological commonalities" between biodynamics and Nazi blood and soil doctrines.[92] Other scholars point out that blood and soil rhetoric centered on ignominious racial principles, positing a fundamental divide between race theories and ecological precepts.[93]

Such conclusions mark a noteworthy advance over the simplified portrait of Darré as an early green hero, but take insufficient account of the historical context within which biodynamic thinking evolved. Despite the political heterogeneity of the anthroposophist milieu, there were substantial points of convergence between biodynamic philosophy and the tenets of blood and soil, some of them stemming from common roots in pre-Nazi culture. The chief protagonists of biodynamic cultivation shared a pronounced Germanocentric vision and a firm commitment to the special mission of the German "national spirit."[94] Racial theory also played a prominent role in anthroposophical thought, linking spiritual and biological features.[95] These themes formed an important part of anthroposophy long before Hitler's accession to power.[96] Nor was the subject merely a matter of ideology; aside from their involvement at various concentration camps, biodynamic proponents served in the Nazi racial bureaucracy as well. Hans Merkel was a leading

[92] Vogt, *Entstehung und Entwicklung des ökologischen Landbaus*, 152.
[93] The most sophisticated and informed argument along these lines can be found in Gerhard, "Breeding Pigs and People for the Third Reich" and Gerhard, "Richard Walther Darré – Naturschützer oder 'Rassenzüchter'?"
[94] Extended statements can be found in Franz Dreidax's January 1934 text "Versuchsanstellungen mit biologisch-dynamischer Wirtschaftsweise," BA R3602/2608, and Erhard Bartsch's October 1940 text "Aufbau einer in sich geschlossenen bäuerlichen Volkshochschule," BA NS15/304: 57090-99. Ex post facto anthroposophist accounts routinely deny the relationship between their movement and Nazism. "It is common," notes Gert Groening, "for anthroposophists to react indignantly when connections between National Socialism and anthroposophy are mentioned." Gert Groening, "The 'Landscape Must Become the Law' – Or Should It?" *Landscape Research* 32 (2007): 595-612, quote at 605.
[95] Cf. Helmut Zander, "Anthroposophische Rassentheorie: Der Geist auf dem Weg durch die Rassengeschichte" in *Völkische Religion und Krisen der Moderne: Entwürfe "arteigener" Glaubenssysteme seit der Jahrhundertwende*, ed. Stefanie von Schnurbein and Justus Ulbricht (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), 292-341, and Peter Staudenmaier, "Race and Redemption: Racial and Ethnic Evolution in Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy" *Nova Religio* 11 (2008): 4-36.
[96] Examples include Elise Wolfram, *Die germanischen Heldensagen als Entwickelungsgeschichte der Rasse* (Leipzig: Altmann, 1910); Sigismund von Gleich, "Der Ursprung des Menschen," *Waldorf-Nachrichten*, October 1920, 453-56; Ernst Uehli, *Nordisch-Germanische Mythologie als Mysteriengeschichte* (Basel: Geering, 1926); Richard Karutz, "Zur Frage von Rassebildung und Mischehe," *Die Drei*, May 1930, 94-102.

official in the SS Office of Race and Settlement, and Albert Friehe, a functionary of the biodynamic association, was a staff member of the Nazi party's Office of Race Policy.[97]

Biodynamic representatives contributed substantially to this conjoining of racial and rural discourse, gaining sympathizers in many different corners of the polycratic Nazi regime. At times the points of ideological contact were quite specific; in 1937 an organic dairy farmer from Silesia declared that both biodynamics and Nazism were based on "closeness to nature," while in 1938 biodynamic advocates blamed profit-oriented chemical agriculture on "Jewish influence."[98] A 1941 letter from an anthroposophist and biodynamic advocate similarly lamented that German efforts to maintain "healthy soil" were threatened by "Jewish influence" and "racially foreign infiltration."[99] The biodynamic movement's anti-materialist stance sometimes won it praise from Nazi antisemites. An adulatory 1940 text proclaimed: "We are confident that biodynamic agriculture will continue to realize the ideal goal. Ordinary materialism is digging its own grave: the cow is not a milk factory, the hen is not an egg-laying machine, the soil is not a chemical laboratory, as the Jew-professors would have us believe."[100]

Conclusion

The experience of biodynamic agriculture under the aegis of Nazism has bequeathed a complicated and uncomfortable legacy to contemporary debates on environmental politics, sustainability, and alternative agricultural approaches. While some continue to deny the role of

[97] BA PK/A199: 2718, BA PK/C313: 1119-1178, and BA R9349/2/F.
[98] Ernst Schaaf to Bürgermeister der Stadt Reichenbach, July 6, 1937, BA R9349/1; "Akten-Vermerk für Herrn Hanns Georg Müller," December 1938, BA R9349/3/M.
[99] Franz Löffler to Erhard Bartsch, January 22, 1941, BA NS15/304: 57069-73. Anthroposophist Hanns Voith, owner of several biodynamic estates, proffered a similar analysis in 1935. Expressing his "wholehearted and unreserved" support for "the generous social reforms of the National Socialist government," Voith deplored the "lies" about Steiner spread by the "Jewish and Masonic influenced press" of the Weimar era. Hanns Voith, November 23, 1935, BA R58/6194/1: 201-206.
[100] Armin Süßenguth, review of anthroposophist Ehrenfried Pfeiffer's book *Die Fruchtbarkeit der Erde* in *Leib und Leben*, September 1940, 93; cf. Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, *Die Fruchtbarkeit der Erde, ihre Erhaltung und Erneuerung: Das biologisch-dynamische Prinzip in der Natur* (Basel: Zbinden & Hügin, 1938).

green ideas and actions in the Third Reich, others have seized on this history as evidence of the pernicious past of organic farming itself.[101] These conclusions are historically shortsighted. The interwar years were a period of upheaval and transition in agriculture in many parts of the industrialized world, a crucial context for clashes over organic farming in Nazi Germany. In this sense, the Nazi era was an arena of conflict between contending visions for the future of European agriculture, a conflict which cannot be reduced to easy ex post facto interpretations. Moreover, the *politics* of biodynamic farming often overshadowed the more straightforwardly ecological factors at stake, subsuming differences over food standards and soil productivity into elementary disputes about the meaning and direction of the nation itself.

The contentious details of the biodynamic movement's involvement in Nazi environmental endeavors offer few simple lessons. Like any other independent tendency, organic adherents confronted formidable enmity from some Nazi quarters. At the same time, there were extensive efforts by several Nazi factions to encourage sustainable agricultural practices and provide them with institutional support, and organic advocates systematically cultivated such official support. The evidence also shows the degree to which alternative health and diet proposals were endorsed and promoted during the Third Reich as a component of national rebirth. But the concrete contours of this process do not reveal a more sympathetic side of the Nazi regime. What they reveal is an ongoing struggle over the direction of German agriculture and environmental policy as part of Nazism's overall destructive trajectory. This struggle warrants more research and more reflection than it has so far received.

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[101] Suggestions of the latter view appear in works such as Thomas DeGregori, *Origins of the Organic Agriculture Debate* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2003). The former view, in contrast, often depends on the assumption that the link between agrarian values and racial themes in Nazi Germany included no authentically ecological elements, an anachronistic and antiquated assumption that neglects longstanding research on the political elasticity of ecological ideals; for pertinent background cf. Peter Hay, "Ecological Values and Western Political Traditions: From Anarchism to Fascism," *Politics* 8 (1988): 22-29, and Douglas Weiner, "Demythologizing Environmentalism," *Journal of the History of Biology* 25 (1992): 385-411.

Rather than an inspiring story of noble resistance to Nazi predations or a cautionary tale about capitulating to the dubious charms of fascism in green garb, the history of biodynamic enterprises in the Third Reich leaves us with a series of provocative questions. Many of these questions revolve around under-examined features of the Nazi era: fundamental disagreements over priorities of production and sustainability in the farming sector; ongoing efforts by practitioners of organic agriculture to link the images of nature and nation and present their approach as the most appropriate form of farming for the German national community; the convergence of ideals about healthy food and diet and healthy soil within Nazi contexts; the role of holistic conceptions of lifestyle and environment and their appropriation by a range of Nazi agencies; the consistent linkage of visions of ecological purity and ethnic-racial purity and their significance to Nazi plans for the conquered Eastern territories.

Attending to these details does not mean disregarding or downplaying Nazism's enormously destructive impact on the European environment. It means widening our historical horizon and taking seriously the countervailing proto-ecological tendencies within the Nazi regime, many of which sustained high levels of support from various sectors of the polycentric apparatus for a remarkably long time. Making sense of such circumstances may require a shift in perspective. These Nazi initiatives around environmentally sensitive public works, organic agriculture, habitat protection, and related matters are perhaps better seen not as mere camouflage or peculiar deviations from the destructive path of the Nazi juggernaut, but as part and parcel of the Nazi project for remaking the landscape of Europe, ethnically as well as ecologically. Ignoring their impact lessens our understanding of the full dimensions of that project and its attempted implementation under the banner of blood and soil.

Biodynamic practitioners played a significant part in trying to bring that project to fruition. The multivalent affiliations among life reform tendencies, alternative sub-cultures, and myriad holistic and nature-oriented beliefs and practices provided one of the unsteady stages on which the fitful development of Nazism played itself out. However inadvertently and inconsistently, between 1933 and 1945 organic ideals of natural cultivation and regeneration, of healing the ravages of materialism and redeeming the land and its people, converged with deeply regressive political realities. This disquieting history need not discredit organic initiatives as a whole. Instead it poses a legitimate challenge for environmental historians and environmental activists alike: the challenge of coming to terms with an equivocal and perplexing past.